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Syllabus of a Discussion on Self-Government in School

(PREPARED FOR THE FACULTY MEETING.)

Wilbur S. Jackman

I. The question of government is paramount in school as it is paramount in national life. Government in the one is a counterpart of that in the other.

1. The administration of government is for the purpose of maintaining those harmonious relationships among people which constitute the condition called order.

2. The reason for the administration of government is to secure economy of effort to the individual.

3. Government must afford the greatest possible liberty to the individuals, compatible with the integrity of the whole, and it must secure a perpetuation of freedom.

II. The Jeffersonian principle, "All men are created free and equal," is, under any conception of government, unalterably true.

1. Almost all discussion of this principle has turned upon the application and meaning of the term "equal." Many of the difficulties in government have arisen from a false interpretation of the term "free."

2. In the past all forms of government have rested upon the theory of the freedom of the will. Modern science denies the truth of this theory. (See Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe*.)

3. If the scientist is right, how will this in the future affect all which pertains to the so-called freedom of the individual?

4. Whether the being acts from choice within, or from impulse without, the question of environment is equally important.

III. Out of the social relations of mankind are developed laws that are as inex-

orable as any of the physical laws that relate to the material world.

1. As the violation of a physical law inevitably means distress or death to the physical life of the individual, so a violation of a social law inevitably means social deterioration, and ultimately social death.

2. Both laws—all laws—are natural laws, unalterable and inexorable. The individual is not more rigidly conditioned by the soil and climate than he is by his fellows.

IV. In the past the individual has been considered from the wrong point of view.

1. The "Total Depravity" theory demands that the individual be controlled by a fiat from without.

2. The evolution theory regards the individual as capable of growth; born with organs and instincts capable of refined adaptations, but profoundly ignorant of all conditions of physical and social life.

V. In governing the child, the same rules should hold respecting his social and civil life that are observed in developing his physical life.

1. Mortality statistics of childhood show how weak the child is in the face of his physical environment. More than half of those born die under the age of five. Physical safety depends upon the child being surrounded by countless prohibitions, the nature of which he cannot understand.

2. The countless breaches of the social relations of which childhood is unwittingly guilty, as well as the inmates of houses of correction, show how helpless the child is in the face of his social environment, and

arbitrary prohibitions are as necessary here as in his physical life.

VI. Prohibitive measures from without are rendered unnecessary as a knowledge of all social and physical conditions grows.

As no one can fully command complete knowledge of all conditions, either physical or social, some prohibitive measures must always remain.

VII. True growth into freedom implies that *when a privilege is granted a corresponding responsibility is entailed*.

1. Most people rejoice in freedom, but chafe under the natural responsibility; this is due either to ignorance or viciousness.

2. It is impossible for children to feel responsibility regarding many of the affairs of social life in which they participate—hence they deserve, at the hands of their elders, protection through prohibitive measures.

VIII. It is evident that democracy in national life is possible only through a training in democracy in school-life.

Despotism in the schoolroom trains for anarchy out of it.

IX. Government, whether of a democracy or a despotism, always implies control.

1. Control in a democracy is as absolute and as rigid as in a despotism.

2. Self-government in the school is frequently interpreted to mean absence of all control—anarchy.

X. Democratic government in the school or out of it becomes efficient only so far as it organizes the good elements of society as a social and civil force against the evil. The former always preponderates over the latter.

1. The function of the teacher is to use the wisdom of his years in assisting in this organization.

2. A despotic attitude on the part of the teacher forces the good to train with the bad, and to aid and abet the evil-doer.

3. The good instincts in the schoolroom are always the salvation of the school, whether the teacher is blind to them or not.

XI. The laws of society are enacted to control the ignorant and the idle.

1. As the work of the school enlists the vital interest of childhood, the difficulties of government recede to the vanishing-point.

XII. The machinery of a democratic form of government is not less complex than that of a despotism.

In a democracy the source of power is in the many, the immediate control in the hands of the few.

XIII. Laws are the last resort of society. Therefore, in the school, none should be enacted by the school democracy that are not forced upon it by the peculiar conditions of the school-life itself.

Community Life as a Basis for a Course of Study

Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen

The ideal school is the ideal community. The teacher is an organizer of community life. The one true end and aim of all human life is to assist in the evolution of community life.—*Francis W. Parker.*

Education is not a preparation for life; it is life.

The tragic weakness of the present school is that it endeavors to prepare future members of

the social order in a medium in which the conditions of the social spirit are eminently wanting.

The only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situation in which he finds himself.

Education must occur through forms of life that are worth living for their own sake.—*John Dewey.*